



High School Reform

Legislative Advocacy
State Board of Education

State Board Position Statements

- Improve the quality of high school education to better prepare students for college and/or careers.

Overview

The case for change in America's high schools is well documented: graduation rates are too low, too many students are struggling learners, and much of the curriculum needs to be revamped to better prepare our youth – not just to become employed, but also to be informed, productive, and successful citizens. Research shows that 70% of jobs today and into the future will require at least a 2-year degree, while the percentage of unskilled jobs – those requiring a high school diploma or less – will decline to 10%. This proposal outlines a number of initiatives that will help improve the quality of high school education to help ensure they have the skills necessary to be successful after high school and in life beyond college.

Background/Talking Points

High school reform or improvement has been a State Board priority for the past five years. The Urban Education Network's 2001 "Redefinition of High School" report and the state's 2002 "Focus on High Schools" report were the first to highlight the many challenges facing Iowa's high schools. Governor Tom Vilsack convened a cross-section of Iowans in 2003 to study the transitions of students from prekindergarten to employment as part of the Iowa Learns Council. In 2004, nearly 1,500 participants attended the statewide High School Summit. In 2005, 12 districts hosted Community Conversations to gain public input into the improvement process and Dept. of Education Director Judy Jeffrey visited with representatives from every district in the state to discuss needs for and barriers to high school improvements. The second annual Statewide High School Summit was held in January 2006. During this time, various groups and research studies have called for general reforms of high schools.

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Talking Points:

- As the workplace becomes more sophisticated and technology makes the world smaller, Iowa high schools are challenged to equip their students with the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful and competitive with others from around the globe.
- Many noteworthy organizations – including Achieve, numerous education experts, and the National Governors Association – have studied the need for high school reform and brought forth solid recommendations based on research. Many of these recommendations point to the need for more students to take courses that are more advanced to better prepare them for work and higher education.
- Studies also point to the essential need for relevance and relationships in high schools. Simply adding – and testing the students on – advanced physiology or trigonometry will not amount to true reform of high schools. The goal for students must be not just what to think, but *how* to think, how to apply that knowledge in a variety of circumstances, setting the foundation for lifelong learning. Relevance – teaching students why things are important, and to apply and adapt information – is the key to motivating students to invest their time and energy in the more rigorous work they need.
- Both rigor and relevance depend heavily on relationships for success. Studies show that rigor has a tendency to increase as the degree of relevance and the quality of relationships improve. That's because students are more likely to engage in rigorous learning when they know that teachers, parents, and other students actually care how well they do. They are motivated to try hard when they are connected, encouraged, supported, and assisted; and are more likely to have higher expectations and goals, and more likely to go to college.
- Schools need help in overcoming barriers to providing a rigorous and relevant curriculum; for example:
 - The inherent variety in district calendars (days in school and bell times) makes it difficult to share teachers or courses.
 - The shortage of math and science teachers makes it difficult to offer a varied or deep curriculum.
 - Advanced Placement exam expenses prohibit some student participation.
 - Overall, budget constraints limit districts' ability to provide expanded opportunities.

Key components of draft legislation

- Expand Regional Academies to include additional resources if the districts collaborating in the regional academies adopt a common high school calendar. Common calendars could be established based upon factors such as:
 - Athletic conferences
 - Area education agencies
 - Community colleges
 - Regional telecommunications councils
- Model Core Curriculum resources to support training and technical assistance for the implementation of requirements of SF 245 (passed in 2005).

- Incentive programs to increase the numbers of upper level science and mathematics teachers would be created. Collaboration with the College Student Aid Commission and the Iowa Student Loan Liquidity Corporation would put in place stipends, loan forgiveness, and tuition reimbursements to incent new teachers into obtaining physics, chemistry, and upper level math endorsements. Teacher would only access the incentives if they were delivering instruction in upper level math and science.
- Create an Advanced Supplemental Weighting to ensure that all students taking an Advanced Placement course could take the AP exam as well. The supplemental weight would cover the cost of the exam for every AP student in Iowa.
- A sharing incentives program would be created to promote district sharing administrative/operational functions like business management, human resource, custodial, transportation, food service, and clerical functions.

Research Support/Additional Resources

These additional resources describe the potential positive benefits of improving rigor, relevance, and relationships in high school:

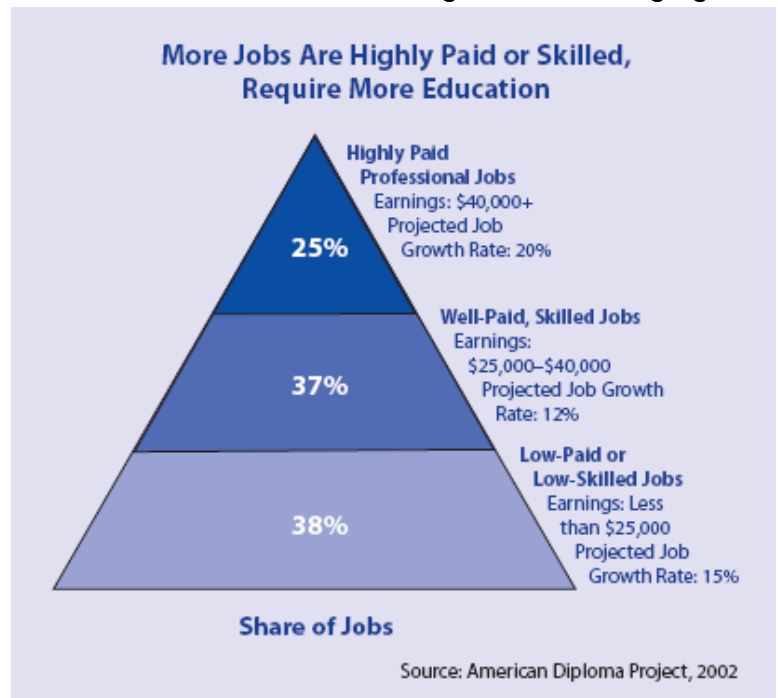
- Urban Education Network 2001 report, Redefinition of High School: <http://www.uen-ia.org/initiatives.htm>.
- Iowa Department of Education 2002 Focus on High School report: <http://www.iowa.gov/educate/ecese/hsbf/documents.html>
- "Improving Rigor and Relevance in the High School Curriculum," Iowa Department of Education, 2005: <http://www.iowa.gov/educate/ecese/hsbf/documents.html>.
- Community Conversations, recommendations and examples of high school reform, 2005: <http://www.iowa.gov/educate/ecese/hsbf/documents.html>.
- Iowa Learns Council Recommendations: <http://www.state.ia.us/iowalearns/reports.html>.
- International Center for Leadership in Education: www.icle.net.
- "Creating a High School Diploma That Counts," Achieve, 2004: <http://www.achieve.org/achieve.nsf/Publications?OpenForm>.

Data Support

Summaries of available data describing current state and future projections including potential costs.

- High school officials report in the High School Review Summary at <http://www.iowa.gov/educate/ecese/hsbf/documents.html> that:
 - Districts sometimes cannot find or afford to hire quality teachers to teach a wide range of courses or advanced courses.
 - School calendar or bell time conflicts make it difficult to share courses or teachers with neighboring districts or higher education institutions.
 - Students are not choosing to take the challenging courses offered by the school.

- Seniors are not taking a full load of courses.
- Students don't understand the connection between their classes and "real world" applications.
- Iowa's 90% graduation rate is one of the best in the country, but needs to improve, particularly for low-income and minority students. <http://www.iowa.gov/educate/fis/pre/coer/index.html>.
- Iowa has a lower than average percentage of students who take Advanced Placement courses. More students should enroll in AP courses to get the challenging coursework they need and to prepare them for college.
- Iowa joins many other states in facing serious teacher shortages within the next five years. The worst shortages will be in math and science teachers. We will need to be very competitive to recruit and retain the best instructors. 18 percent of high school teachers have reached or will have reached the rule of 88 in the next four years. However, in physics, chemistry, and math, the number is closer to 30 percent. Concurrently, in 04-05 for example, 14 students graduated with a physics endorsement.
- More students need to take more core coursework to be better prepared for college. In Iowa, job projections for 2002-2012 show more job openings will occur in occupations that require some postsecondary training, and they pay better wages. www.iowaworkforce.org/lmi/occupations/outlook/index.html www.iowaworkforcedevelopment.gov.
- Nationally, the number of low-skilled jobs (requiring a high school diploma or less) is declining. See Bureau of Labor Statistics, relationship between education attainment, career opportunities, and wages: www.bls.gov/emp/optd/home.htm.
- Employment stability (year-round work with regular and predictable wages) is much higher in persons with at least a high school diploma. www.bls.gov/emp/optd/home.htm.
- Sharing operational expenses will create additional local resources for districts to expand student opportunities.



Response to the Critics: Questions and Answers

Question 1: Why not just set a statewide school calendar or universal bell times?

Answer: Research shows that neither a statewide calendar nor uniform bell times would be feasible in a state the size of Iowa. In fact, no state has been able to implement a uniform statewide schedule because of inherent local needs to make time for varying bus routes, specific extra-curricular activities (such as concerts or sports), or professional development activities unique to teachers in a specific district or building. It is more practical to ask districts in a given region or athletic conference, for instance, to work together to create common scheduling elements that will benefit students. For instance, neighboring districts may not be able to coordinate exact bell times, but they may be able to make slight modifications that will ensure students could share the same ICN course, or collaborate on spring break schedules.

Question 2: Isn't it unfair to pay certain (math and science) teachers more than others? All teachers are important, so shouldn't they all be paid on the same, equal scale?

Answer: All teachers are important, and we are proposing salary increases for all teachers. However, we need additional incentives for math and science teachers because we are facing a simple reality of economics – generally, we expect and are willing to pay more for something that is in high demand but short supply. Think of food or crop shortages that occur because of bad weather in a region. All grains are important, but we'll pay more for corn when it's in short supply. All fruits are important, but we'll pay a premium for oranges when a hurricane has ravaged the crops in Florida. Math and science teachers receive unique pressures from the business world – additional pay for those teachers will help to counter pressure by the business sector to recruit our best and brightest math and science teachers.

Question 3: Why are we promoting Advanced Placement classes when students can take dual credit or PSEO classes and get immediate college credit for them?

Answer: We aren't promoting AP over dual credit or PSEO – all three have great value and should be available to all students. We'd like to increase the number of students who take AP because the courses are high quality, provide challenging content, and do a good job of preparing students for college. Iowa has room to improve here; we currently have one of the lowest participation rates nationwide. We also would like to create a good data set from those students who do take AP courses – currently, not all students take the test.

Question 4: Why support model curriculum for just core classes? Other subjects and electives are as important as math, science, and language arts.

Answer: Legislation last year required that the DE develop model core curriculum for implementation in fall 2006. We recognize that students need a broad range of courses and skills to be successful beyond high school, so our goal (dependent upon funding) is

to expand on the core model, do further research, and offer recommendations or models for additional skill areas. To effectively help school districts understand and implement the model core curriculum will require some resource and no funding was attached to SF 245.

Question 5: Wouldn't statewide content standards or graduation requirements be the best way to improve high schools?

Answer: The state DOES have content standards that must be incorporated into the local content standards that are developed by each district. We don't have any evidence that identical statewide content standards would improve student achievement. Statewide graduation requirements also do not represent a single or quick fix that would assure high school improvement. It is the course content not the course label that matters, and the quality of instruction that will make the biggest impact on high school learning.

Question 6: Wouldn't it be better to close all the small schools rather than ask them to share resources?

Answer: There is no perfect or ideal size for a high school; many of the small high schools in the state provide an outstanding education for their students. Because Iowa is still a largely rural state, we will have small high schools. The key is to provide resources and supports to make sure that all high schools are high quality, regardless of their size. The Department continues to promote ways for schools to operate efficiently so that additional resources can be available to support student programming – this is simply another way to create system-wide efficiencies.

Important Legislative and Governmental Stakeholders

House of Representatives Leaders

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House of Representatives Committee Leaders

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Rep. Jeff Kaufmann, R (79 – Wilton)	Vice Chair, Education Committee jeff.kaufmann@legis.state.ia.us
Rep. Royd Chambers, R (5 – Sheldon)	Chair – Education Approps. Subcommittee royd.chambers@legis.state.ia.us
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Other key House legislators on this topic: Any of the other members of the House Standing Education Committee or the Education Appropriations Subcommittee (see link below)

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House Education Committee: <http://www3.legis.state.ia.us/ga/committee.do?id=21>

House Human Resources Committee:

<http://www3.legis.state.ia.us/ga/committee.do?id=24>

Education Approps Sub: <http://www3.legis.state.ia.us/ga/committee.do?id=35>

Health and Human Resources Approps Sub:

<http://www3.legis.state.ia.us/ga/committee.do?id=37>

Senate Leadership

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Senate Human Resources Committee:

<http://www3.legis.state.ia.us/ga/committee.do?id=7>

Education Approps Sub: <http://www3.legis.state.ia.us/ga/committee.do?id=35>

Health and Human Resources Approps Sub:

<http://www3.legis.state.ia.us/ga/committee.do?id=37>

Groups with which you should advocate on this issue

Farm Bureau Representatives
Chambers of Commerce
Rotary Clubs
Lion's Clubs
PTAs/PTOs
Local newspaper editors
Any Economic Development groups
Local labor union representatives, specifically law enforcement and fire fighters

Groups that are already advocates for this issue

Iowa Association of School Boards
School Administrators of Iowa
Iowa State Education Association
Urban Education Network
Area Education Agencies
Board of Regents
Community College Trustees

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